

## Event Summary

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The 2014 Strategic Leaders Global Summit, co-hosted by CGS and Memorial University Newfoundland, was held in Newfoundland, Canada from September 7-10. Senior graduate leaders representing fourteen different countries met to discuss the theme “Interdisciplinary Learning in Graduate Education and Research.” Graduate institutions around the world are tasked with preparing master’s and doctoral students to approach the complex questions in a global society, which cannot be answered using a single method or approach. The concept of interdisciplinary research and learning has therefore become increasingly appealing to university leaders seeking to build excellent graduate programs.

At the 2014 Global Summit, a small group of about 35 leaders considered interdisciplinarity in an international context. They reflected on questions such as: How is interdisciplinary graduate education and research defined by graduate institutions in different countries and regions? What challenges of interdisciplinary graduate education are common to most universities around the globe? What can we learn from different models of successful interdisciplinary training and research?

Participants included many delegates from CGS international members and international groups of graduate education leaders. Along with Canada and the United States, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, China (PRC and Hong Kong), Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Africa, and the United Kingdom were all represented at the meeting.

### Panel I: National and Regional Contexts

The Summit opened in St. John’s, NL in the evening of September 7. For the opening panel, the Summit Steering Committee provided an overview of interdisciplinarity in graduate education and research as it is understood in the context of their home nations and regions. Summit co-host CGS President **Suzanne T. Ortega** sparked a rigorous discussion by challenging panelists to consider what graduate schools mean when they use the term interdisciplinarity. **Noreen Golfman** called interdisciplinary experiences in Canada “a forest of diversity,” and this characterization aptly describes the views represented at the Summit as well. For example, **Shiyi Chen** (Peking University) identified one objective of interdisciplinarity in China as “generating new bodies of knowledge,” adding that the concept involved “creating new areas that solve a problem which cannot be solved by traditional methods.” **Laura Poole-Warren** (University of New South Wales) advocated the use of “public good” outcomes as a tool for fostering interdisciplinary research. **Melita Kovacevik** (European University Association) noted that even within Europe, each discipline understands the concept of interdisciplinarity differently. This discussion reflected the many nuanced understandings of interdisciplinarity at play, contextualizing the following panels.

## Panel II: Creating Institutional Cultures that Value Interdisciplinary Learning

The following day, participants traveled to a conference center in the small fishing village of Port Rexton for the core Summit sessions. The presentations for this panel examined strategies deans could use to create institutional cultures that value interdisciplinary learning and research. Again, participants differed as to what constitutes an interdisciplinary culture. Panel moderator **Liviu Matei** (Central European University) suggested that including some interdisciplinary statements in a strategic development plan may help graduate schools focus on interdisciplinarity as one of “the values, norms, and behaviors that are considered acceptable and promoted at the university.” **Nancy Marcus** (Florida State University) posited that interdisciplinary culture might be considered as “an openness to all ideas” and “respect for different views,” while Suzanne T. Ortega defined it as “the capacity of an institution to move quickly to deploy new combinations of expertise to rapidly-emerging, important problems.”

Panelists shared diverse approaches to fostering these kinds of cultures. **Jay Doering** (University of Manitoba) outlined a program he created to accommodate students whose program of study spans two or more academic departments. **Denise Cuthbert** (RMIT University) identified a host of strategies for moving beyond the “over-laying of interdisciplinary . . . centres,” including the joint appointments of staff. **Lesley Wilson** (European University Association) argued that the greater value funding agencies in Europe are beginning to place on interdisciplinary research has the potential to drive changes to individual university cultures.

## Panel III: Building Interdisciplinary Degree Programs

The presentations for panel three shifted in focus to the administrative structures that support interdisciplinary degree programs. **Tao Tao** (Xiamen University) described some of the investments the central government of China is making in interdisciplinary programs, including one at Xiamen University to study the culture and history of Taiwan. One seemingly simple structure for interdisciplinary programs is to provide a student with two mentors, from different disciplines, who share responsibility for supervising the dissertation. **Robert Augustine** (Eastern Illinois University) initiated a rich discussion on the merits and challenges associated with the dual mentoring model, which is common in many different contexts.

The dual mentorship discussion touched on the importance of formal procedures to reduce the administrative burden of students. One strategy included determining mentorship workloads by percentage: **Jay Doering** (University of Manitoba) described some institutions where one mentor is responsible for up to 80% and the other at least 20%. Another, advocated by **Mark Smith** (Purdue University), involved developing processes for mediating disputes between mentors.

## Panel IV: Innovations in Interdisciplinary Learning and Research

Panel four addressed innovations including non-degree program options and activities, mentoring and advising, and electronic resources in interdisciplinary learning and research. Panelists shared specific initiatives at their home institutions that deliver interdisciplinary experiences to students without requiring them to take formal interdisciplinary degrees. Student-directed initiatives, presented **Marie Audette** (Université Laval), create important opportunities for students to come together in a more “casual,” lower-stakes environment.

**Roger Horn** (Deakin University) took the position that interdisciplinary research, in particular,

is an essential component of a healthy university ecosystem. He noted that the value of interdisciplinary research is often apparent to experienced researchers, but that graduate students may need guidance to see research potential beyond their disciplines. The growing need for tools to support this interdisciplinary research was addressed in the presentation by **Rafael Sidi** (ProQuest). Mr. Sidi highlighted ProQuest databases' role in "creating serendipity" through broad literature search results.

### **Panels V and VI: Structures for Interdisciplinary Research and Collaboration**

On Tuesday, September 9, the Summit continued with panels discussing the structures for interdisciplinary research and collaboration within STEM and the humanities as well as across broad fields and with external partners. **Mohan Kankanhalli** (National University of Singapore) presented on the "integrative clusters" that house interdisciplinary STEM research efforts at the National University of Singapore. Research teams tackling problem-based agendas seemed to be a common feature of many universities' interdisciplinary work. Because the government of Malaysia has indicated that certain research done at the university must contribute back to society, **Zaidatun Tasir** (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia) reported that social scientists have become integral parts of interdisciplinary research groups there because they frame the questions and challenges of the real-world problems to be addressed by interdisciplinary research teams. Agreeing that social benefit is an important outcome of graduate education, **Barbara Knuth** (Cornell University) indicated that graduate students at Cornell are trained in the "translation of research to the benefit of society," and noted that half of Cornell research doctoral graduates go on to careers that explicitly and directly benefit the public good. This discussion transitioned into one about the importance role of funding agencies, particularly government funders, in promoting interdisciplinary research and learning.

### **Closing Panel: A Statement of Principles**

In the final wrap-up session, participants agreed on a [set of principles](#) supporting interdisciplinary learning in graduate education. A few key concepts framed these statements. First was the idea that interdisciplinarity is characterized by tremendous diversity in definition and practice when viewed in the context of different national cultures, disciplines, and institutions. Second, and related, was the assertion that "[i]nterdisciplinarity is not . . . an end in and of itself," but rather an aim that "must answer specific, identifiable needs" at each institution.

Cohost Noreen Golfman described the work of the principles in a brief statement: "We tend to agree on the importance of interdisciplinarity as a concept, but practicing interdisciplinary teaching, research, and learning presents real challenges for graduate schools and administrators. This week we established a set of principles to guide graduate communities when considering how best to incorporate interdisciplinary learning and research as core values in their academic programs."

The leaders participating in the 2014 Global Summit developed these principles in the hope that colleagues throughout the world might find them useful as a guide for developing new initiatives as well as for demonstrating the importance of interdisciplinarity in graduate programs. These general guidelines reflect the consensus points contained within the specific case studies, examples, and ideas that can be found in the papers presented by each Summit participant.